

Wisconsin Folks: Masters of Tradition



Pat Ehrenberg, born 1955 in Green Lake, Wisconsin, grew up learning how to sew from her mother. "As a child I loved making clothes and quilts for my dolls from scraps of fabrics my mother had left over from sewing my clothes, curtains and other items." In school, she took all the home economics classes she could. As a young mother, she took her first quilting class wanting to make a baby quilt; she instantly became "hooked," expanded her skills through self study, and has continued to quilt for the 30 years since. She has taught traditional quilting for about 20 of those years at area quilt shops, Moraine Park Technical College, and many other venues.

Pat values quilts for the link to the past that they can provide for families, as a connection to earlier generations and a symbol of family history. She treasures a quilt received from her aunt that contains pieces of her great-grandmother's clothing. Pat is fascinated with quilts from the Civil War period and what they can tell us about women's everyday lives at that time. She has developed several presentations on the topic that she delivers to groups upon request. Pat's quilts sometimes focus on place, as when her quilt guild, the Sew Happy Stitchers, in honor of the state's Sesquicentennial, led a community project to create a medallion quilt with blocks depicting their hometown of Ripon. Pat also appreciates how the process of quilting can provide strong links between quilters, most of whom are women. Quilt guilds and quilt retreats deepen the connections made through shared artistic interests. "The camaraderie between women especially in quilting is so important. It ties them together on more than just a skill level."

Pat's apprentice was Jill Koopman of Waupun, Wisconsin. They focused on hand stitching in order to best learn basic elements and incorporated machine stitching later in the process. Jill made several projects in order to learn specific skills such as appliqué and fusing. As the final element, Jill gave a presentation on the apprenticeship to the Sew Happy Stitchers. In return, guild members gave her gifts of "fat quarter" fabrics so that she would have plenty of inspiration to continue on with her new interest in quilting.

For Jill, this opportunity to work with an artist she had admired for many years was motivating. "It has brought out my creativity which had been stored deep down inside me that I forgot I had."

"My quilts are supposed to be touched and used." Pat Ehrenberg